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THE CHILD IN JEWISH LITERATURE.

"I SAW a Jewish lady only yesterday with a child at her knee, and from whose face towards the child there shone a sweetness so angelical that it seemed to form a sort of glory round both. I protest I could have knelt before her, too, and adored in her the divine beneficence in endowing us with the material *storgé* which began with our race and sanctifies the history of mankind." These words, which are taken from Thackeray's "Pendennis," may serve as a starting-point for this paper. The fact that the great student of man perceived this glory just round the head of a Jewish lady rouses in me the hope that the small student of letters may, with a little search, be able to discover in the remains of our past, many similar traces of this divine beneficence and sanctifying sentiment. Certainly the glimpses which we shall catch from the faded leaves of ancient volumes, dating from bygone times, will not be so bright as those which the novelist was so fortunate as to catch from the face of a lady whom he saw but the previous day. The mothers and fathers, about whom I am going to speak in this paper, have gone long ago, and the objects of their anxiety and troubles have also long ago vanished. But what the subject will lose in brightness, it may perhaps gain in reality and intensity. A few moments of enraptured devotion do not make up the saint. It is a whole series of feelings and sentiments betrayed on different occasions, expressed in different ways, a whole life of sore troubles, of bitter disappointments, but also moments of most elevated joys and real happiness.

And surely these manifestations of the divine beneficence, which appear in their brightest glory in the literature of every nation when dealing with the child, shine strongest in the literature of the Jewish nation. In it, to possess a child, was always considered as the greatest blessing God could bestow on man, and to miss it as the greatest curse. The patriarch Abraham, with whom we enter on history, complains—"Oh Lord, what will thou give me, seeing I go childless!"

The Rabbis declared the childless man as dead, whilst the Cabbalist in the Middle Ages thought him who died without posterity as one who failed in his mission in this world, so that he would have to appear again on our planet to fulfil this duty. To trace out the feelings which accompanied the object of their greatest anxiety, to let them pass before the reader in some way approaching to a chronological order, to draw attention to some points more worthy of being emphasised than others, is the aim of this paper.¹

I said that I propose to treat the subject in chronological order. I meant by this that I shall follow the child in the different stages through which it has to pass from its birth until it ceases to be a child and attains its majority. This latter period is the beginning of the thirteenth year in the case of a female, and the beginning of the fourteenth year in the case of a male. I shall have occasion later on to examine this point more closely.

But there is the embryo-period which forms a kind of preliminary stage in the life of the child, and plays a very important part in the region of Jewish legends. Human imagination always occupies itself most with the things of which we know least. And so it got hold of this semi-existence of man, the least accessible to experience and observation, and surrounded it by a whole cycle of all sorts of legends and stories. They are too numerous to be related here. But I shall hint at a few points which I consider as the most conspicuous features of these legends.

These legends are chiefly based on the notion of the pre-

¹ The chief authority on this subject is the work *Die Lebensalter*, by Dr. Leopold Löw, the late chief Rabbi of Szegedin, who put together almost all the references in Jewish literature to our theme. Not wishing to overload this popular essay with unnecessary footnotes, I shall in most cases refrain from giving the authorities, that can easily be found in his work, and shall only refer to those which have been, for some reason or other, left out by Löw, or which have been added since the appearance of his book. A not less excellent book is *Das Kind in Brauch und Sitte der Völker*, by Dr. Plöss, containing most valuable information, especially concerning the customs and usages with primitive nations. That I have made ample use of such books as the *מקורי המנהגים* it is hardly necessary to say.

existence of the soul on the one hand, but on the other hand they are a vivid illustration of the words of the Fathers, "Thou art born against thy will." Thus the soul when it is brought before the throne of God, and is commanded to enter into the body, pleads before him: "O Lord, I was till now holy and pure; do not bring me into contact with what is unclean and common." Thereupon the soul is given to understand that it was for this destination alone that it was created. Another remarkable feature is the warning given to man before his birth that he will be responsible for his actions. He is regularly sworn in. The oath has the double purpose of impressing upon him the consciousness of his duty to lead a holy life, and of arming himself against the danger, lest a holy life make him vain. As if to render this oath more impressive, the unborn hero is provided with two angels who, besides teaching him the whole of the Torah, take him every morning through paradise and show him the glory of the just ones who dwell there. In the evening he is taken to hell to witness the sufferings of the reprobate. But such a lesson would make free will impossible. His future conduct would only be dictated by the fear of punishment and hope of reward. And the moral value of his actions also depends, according to Jewish notions, upon the power to commit sin. Thus another legend records: "When God created the world, he produced on the second day the angels with their natural inclinations to do good, and the absolute inability to commit sin. On the following days again, he created the beasts with their exclusively animal desires. But he was pleased with neither of these extremes. If the angels follow my will, said God, it is only on account of their impotence to act in the opposite direction. I shall therefore create man who will be a combination of both angel and beast, so that he will be able to follow either the good or evil inclination. His evil deeds will place him beneath the level of animals, whilst his noble aspirations will enable him to obtain a higher position than angels."¹ Care is therefore taken to make the child forget all it has seen and heard in these upper regions. Before it enters the world an angel strikes it on the upper-lip, and all his knowledge and wisdom disappear at once. The pit in the upper-lip is a result of this stroke, which is also the cause why children cry when they are born.

As to the origin of these legends, the main features of which are already to be found in the Talmud, I must refer

¹ Quoted in the פ"מ, § 53, from a Midrash.

the reader to the researches of Löw and others.¹ Here we have only to watch the effect which these legends had upon the minds of Jewish parents. The newly-born child was in consequence looked upon by them as a higher being, which, but a few seconds before, had been conversing with angels and saints, and had now condescended into our profane world to make two ordinary mortals happy. The treatment which the child experienced from its parents, as well as from the whole of the community, was therefore a combination of love and veneration. One may go even further and say that the belief in these legends determine greatly the destination of the child. What other destination could a being of such a glorious past have than to be what an old German Jewish poem expressed in the following lines:

"Geboren soll es wehren
Zu Gottes Ehren."

"The child should be born to the honour of God." The mission of the child is to glorify the name of God on earth. And the whole bringing up of the child in the old Jewish communities was more or less calculated to this end. The words of the Bible, "And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests" were taken literally. And every man felt it his duty to bring up his children, or at least one member of his family, for this calling. How they carried out this programme we shall see later on.

Now, regarding almost every infant as a predestined priest, and thinking of it as having received a certain preparation for this calling before it came into this world, we cannot wonder that the child was supposed to show signs of piety from the days of its earliest existence, and even earlier. Thus we read that even the unborn children joined in with the chorus on the Red Sea and sang the *Shirah*. David again composed Psalms before perceiving the face of this world. On the Day of Atonement they used to communicate to the unborn child through the medium of its mother, that on this great day it had to be satisfied with the good it had received the day before. And when a certain child named Sabbathai in after life refused to listen to such a request, R. Jochanan applied to it the verse from the Psalm, "The wicked are estranged from the womb." Indeed, Sabbathai turned out a great sinner. It will perhaps be interesting to hear what his

¹ Besides Löw, p. 65, see also Freudenthal, *Das IV. Maaccabäerbuch*, p. 48, note 2, and his *Hellenische Studien*, I., 72; Güdemann's *Religionsgeschichte*, Studien 1-20; Joel's *Blicke*, I., 118; and Brüll's *Jahrbuch*, III., 176.

sin was. It consisted in forestalling the corn in the market and afterwards selling it to the poor at a much higher price. Of a certain child the legend tells that it was born with the word אמת (Truth) engraved on its forehead. Its parents named it Amiti, and the child proved to be a great saint.¹

The priest, however, could not enter into his office without some consecration. As the first step to this consecration of the child we may consider the covenant of Abraham. But this was prefaced by a few other solemn acts which I must mention. One of the oldest ceremonies connected with the birth of a child was that of tree-planting. In the case of a boy they planted a cedar, in that of a girl a pine; and on their marriage they cut branches from these trees to form the wedding-canopy.² Other rites followed, but they were more of a medical character, and would be better appreciated by the physician. In the Middle Ages superstition played a great part. To be sure, I have spoken of saints, but we ought not to forget that saints, too, have their foolish moments, especially when they are fighting against hosts of demons, the existence of which is only guaranteed by their own over-excited brains. Jewish parents were for many centuries troubled by the fear of Lilith, the devil's mother, who was suspected of stealing children and killing them. The precautions that they took to prevent this atrocity were as foolish as the object of their fear. Now, I do not intend to enumerate here all these various precautions. Every country almost has its own usages and charms, one more absurd than the other. It will suffice to refer here to the most popular of these charms in which certain angels are invoked to protect the child against its dangerous enemy Lilith. But of whatever origin they may be, Judaism could do better without them. The only excuse for their existence among us is to my mind that they provoked the famous Dr. Erter to the composition of one of the finest satires in the Hebrew language.³

Of a less revolting character was the so-called ceremony of the "Reading of the Shema." It consisted in taking all the little children of the community into the house of the newly-born child, where the teacher made them read the Shema, sometimes also the ninety-first Psalm. The fact that little

¹ ספר המעשים (ed. Basel), § 166.

² Gittin, 57a.

³ Attempts to explain these charms have been made in the *Hamagid*, III., p. 170, and by Dr. Gaster in his pamphlet *Beiträge zur Vergleichenden Sagen und Märchen-Kunde*, p. 67. We will only remark that MS. Add. 15,229 in the British Museum (101a) has סנמנלף instead of סמננלף, whilst Heb. ii. in Oxford has סנמנלא.

children were the chief actors in this ceremony reconciles one a little with it despite its rather doubtful origin. In some communities these readings took place every evening up to the day when the child was brought into the covenant of Abraham. In other places they performed the ceremony only on the eve of the day of the *Berith*. Indeed this was the night during which Lilith was supposed to play her worst tricks, and the watch over the child was redoubled. Hence the name "Wachnacht," or the "Night of Watching." They remained awake for the whole night, and spent it in feasting and in studying certain portions of the Bible and the Talmud, mostly relating to the event which was to take place on the following day. This ceremony was already known to Jewish writers of the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, it is considered by the best authorities on the subject to be of foreign origin.¹ Quite Jewish, as well as entirely free from superstitious taint, was the visit which was paid to the infant-boy on the first Sabbath of his existence. It was called "Shalom Zachar," probably meaning "Peace-boy," in allusion to a well-known passage in the Talmud to the effect that the advent of a boy in the family brings peace to the world. Some authorities think that this was the ceremony known in the Talmud under the name of שבוע הבן, "the week of the son." But these words, as well as that of ישוע הבן, belong, unfortunately, to that class of Talmudical terms which seem doomed to remain obscure for ever.²

At last the dawn of the great day of the *Berith* came. I shall, however, only touch here on the social aspects of this rite.³

Its popularity began as it seems already in very olden times. The persecutions which Israel suffered for it in the

¹ The latest authority on the subject is Dr. Perles, in the *Graetz-Jubelschrift*, p. 23. See also Güdemann, *Geschichte*, etc., III., 103.

² See Löw, p. 89, 384, where the references to the Talmudic literature are given, to which *Megillath Taanith*, VI., and *Tossephta Sotah* 15 may be added. See also the earlier commentaries to these passages, and the *Aruch*, s. v. שבוע (i.). Löw's explanation that the Jewish שבוע הבן was an imitation of the Greek *hebdomenomena*, and thus observed on the *seventh* day after the birth of the child, gains some support from the commentary of R. Gershon to *Baba Bathra*, which was lately published in the Wilna edition. Here (p. 60b)

we read the words לשבוע הבן שעושין לכוף שבעה. The fact that in certain versions of the *Tractate Semachoth* mention is also made of שבוע הבת (see Nachmanides *חורת האדם* ed. Venice, 35b) makes it still more probable.

³ The late Dr. Asher, in his excellent book "The Jewish Rite of Circumcision," has treated the subject from its Halachic and medical as well as historical sides. In the preface, he gives also an excellent list of authorities on the subject. It is to be hoped that his son-in-law, Dr. Abraham Cohen, will soon re-edit this useful book with the MS. notes of the author and his own additions.

times of the tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes, "when the princes and elders mourned, the virgins and the young men were made feeble, and the beauty of women was changed, and when certain women were put to death for causing their children to be circumcised," are the best proof of the attachment of the people to it. The repeated attempts on this law, both by heathen and Christian hands, only served to increase its popularity. Indeed R. Simeon ben Elazar characterised it as the law for which Israel brought the sacrifice of martyrdom, and therefore held firmly by it. In other words they suffered for it, and it became endeared to them. R. Simeon ben Gamliel declares it to be the only law which Israel performs with joy and exultation.¹ As a sign of this joy we may consider the eagerness and the lively interest which raised this ceremony from a strictly family affair to a matter in which the whole of the community participated. Thus we find that already in the times of the Gaonim the ceremony was transferred from the house of the parents into the synagogue. Here it took place after the prayers, in the presence of the whole congregation. The synagogue used to be especially illuminated in honour of the event. Certain pieces of the daily prayer, of a rather doleful nature, such as the confession of sins, were omitted, lest the harmony of the festival should be disturbed. As a substitute for these prayers, various hymns suitable for the occasion were composed and inserted in the liturgy for the day. As the most prominent members among those present, figured the happy father of the child and the medical man who performed the ceremony, usually called the Mohel or Gozer, both wearing their festival garments and having certain privileges, such as being called up to the Torah and chanting certain portions of the prayers. It is not before the tenth century that a third member suddenly emerges to become almost as important as the father of the child. I am referring to the Sandek or Godfather. In some countries he was also called Baal Berith. In Italy they seemed to have had two Sandeks. This word was for a long time supposed to be the Greek word *συνδικος*. But it is now proved beyond doubt that it is a corruption of the word *συντεκνος* used in the Greek church for Godfather. In the church he was the man who lifted the neophyte from the baptismal waters. Among the Jews, the office of the Sandek was to keep the child on his knees during the performance

¹ *Sabbath*, 130; *Sifre Debarim*, § 76. There is much reason for suggesting that R. Simeon b. Gamliel was the author of both passages. Compare also Rapoport, *Erech Millim*, p. 19.

of the ceremony.¹ The Sandek's place was, or is still, near the seat of honour, which is called the Throne of Elijah, who is supposed to be the angel of the covenant. Other angels, too, were believed to officiate at this ceremony. Thus the angel Gabriel is also said to have performed the office of Sandek to a certain child. According to other sources, the archangel Metatron himself attended the ceremony.² Probably it was on this account that later Rabbis admonished the parents to take only a pious and good Jew as Sandek for their children. Christian theologians also declared that no good Christian must do such a service to a Jew. The famous Buxdorf had to pay a fine of 100 gulden for having attended the Berith of a child, whose father he had employed as reader when editing the well-known Basel Bible. The poor reader himself, who was the cause of Buxdorf's offence, was fined 400 gulden. Of an opposite case in which a Jew served as godfather to a Christian child, we find a detailed account in Schudt's "*Merkwürdigkeiten der Juden*," a very learned and very foolish book. When the father was summoned before the magistrate, and was asked how he dared to charge a Jew with such a holy Christian ceremony, he coolly answered, because he knew that the Jew would present him with a silver cup.³ As to the present, I have to remark that also with the Jews the godfather was expected to bestow a gift on the child. In some communities he had to defray the expenses of the festival-dinner, of which I shall speak presently. In others, again, he had also to give a present to the mother of the child.⁴

Much older than the institution of the Sandek is the festival-dinner just alluded to, which was held after the ceremony.

¹ Besides Löw, p. 84, the originator of this explanation, it is accepted by Dr. Perles in his *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hebräischen und Aramäischen Studien* (München, 1884), p. 56, where also the explanations of other authorities are discussed.

² *Maasch Buch* (ed. Basel), § 179, Shudt's *Merkwürdigkeiten*, II.*, 295. Compare also לקוטי הפרדס לר"י 4b. ³ I. 223.

⁴ The following lines from an anonymous MS. in Oxford (Cat. Neubauer, 273), will not be uninteresting in this place:—

ונהנו ג'כ שהסנדיקום מווג לאם הילד כשמחזיר לה הילד . . . וע"כ נהנו אבותינו בעת הברית שהיולדת מפקרת בנה למילה והסנדיקום נוטלת אותו ואינה יודעת מה שיקרא בעת הברית בלי ספק הוא כמו הקיר' (הקרבן) ובפרט נשים שהם פחדניות וכשלוקחים בנ[ם] הם מפקירים אותו לשמים וכשמחזירים לה בנה נותנים לה שכר הן רב הן מעט ומנהג אבותינו תורה היא ובזה אני נאה דורש ונאה מקיים כי נקראתי לסנדיקום בתנאי שלא אמווג ואחר כותבי נתאמצתי שלא לסור מן המנהג :

Jewish legend supplies many particulars of the dinner the patriarch Abraham gave at the Berith of his son Isaac. This is a little too legendary, but there is ample historical evidence that such meals were already customary in the times of the Second Temple. The Jerusalem Talmud gives us a detailed account of the proceedings which took place at the Berith dinner of Elisha ben Abuyah, who afterwards obtained a sad celebrity as Acher. Considering that Elisha's birth must have fallen in the first decades after the destruction of the Temple, and that these sad times were most unsuitable for introducing new festivals, we may safely date the custom back to the times of the Temple. The way in which the guests entertained themselves is also to be gathered from the passage referred to. First came the dinner, in which all the guests participated; afterwards the great men of Jerusalem occupied one room, indulging there in singing, clapping, and dancing. The scholars again, who apparently did not belong to the great men, were confined to another room, where they enjoyed themselves with discussing Biblical subjects.¹ In later times special hymns, composed for this festival, were inserted in the grace after dinner. After the dinner sermons or speeches used also to be given, the contents of which were usually made up of reflections on Biblical and Talmudical passages relating to the event of the day. Sometimes they consisted of a kind of learned puns on the name which the child received on this occasion.²

With this meal the first consecration of the child-priest was concluded. In some places they used to come to the father's house on the third day after the circumcision with the purpose of making inquiries after the child's health. In the case when the child was the first-born the ceremony of פדיון הבן "redeeming the child" in accordance with Exodus xiii. used to take place. The details of this ceremony are to be found in almost every Prayer-book, and there is nothing fresh to add. But perhaps I may be allowed to draw attention to another distinction that the first-born received in the Middle Ages. I am referring to an account given by the author of the book חוקת התורה, who flourished in the thirteenth century. He says: Our predecessors made the rule

¹ See Yerushalmi, *Chagigah*, II., 1. Löw (p. 90), thinks that this story is antedated, and that it therefore possesses no historical value, but his proofs are in no way convincing. See also *Kohleth Rabbah*, chapter iii., and *Debarim Rabbah* ix., according to which the reference in *Yalkut Mishleh*, § 947, is to be corrected.

² See Cat. Neubauer 970, 2. The Derashah is for the greatest part on the name of the child.

to destine every first-born to God, and before its birth the father had to say, "I take the vow that if my wife presents me with a son, he shall be holy unto the Lord, and in his Torah he shall meditate day and night." On the eighth day after the *Berith Milah* they put the child on cushions, and a Bible on its head, and the elders of the community, or the principal of the college, imparted their blessings to it. These first-born sons formed, when grown up, the chief contingent of the *Yeshiboth* (Talmudical Colleges), where they devoted the greatest part of their lives to the study of the Torah.¹ In later centuries the vow was dropped, but from the abundance of the *Yeshiboth* in Poland and elsewhere it seems as if almost every child was considered as having no other calling but the study of the Torah.² Indeed, the growing persecutions required a strengthening of the religious force.

With these ceremonies the first act of consecration ended in the case when the new-born child was a boy. I will now refer to the ceremony of the name-giving, which was common to male and female. In the case of the former this ceremony was connected with the *Berith Milah*. The oldest formula, which is to be found already in the *Seder Rab Amram Gaon*, is composed in Aramaic. It is, like many prayers in this language, a most beautiful composition, and very suitable for the occasion. Our Hebrew prayer, beginning *קיים את הילד*, etc., is by far less beautiful, and dates from a much later age. In some countries the ceremony of naming was repeated in the house of the parents. It took place on the Sabbath, when the mother returned home from her first visit to the synagogue after her recovery. Here the friends and relatives of the family assembled, and after arranging themselves round the cradle of the child they lifted it three times, shouting the new name at every lifting. This name was the so-called *שם החול*, or profane name, whilst the name it received in the synagogue was the *שם הקודש*, or the Hebrew name. The ceremony concluded with the usual festival dinner. By the way, there was perhaps a little too much feasting in those days. The contemporary Rabbis tried indeed to suppress some of the banquets, and put all sorts of restrictions on dinner-hunting people.³ But considering the fact that, as Jews, they

¹ See Güdemann, *Geschichte*, etc., in *Frankreich und Deutschland*, I., 270, § 5, but see also 267, § 1. The biblical stories of Samson, Samuel, and Levi (according to *Bereshith Rabbah*, chapter 70 and parallel passages) offer a kind of parallel to this custom.

² See *מנצלה*, ed. Venice, 11a.

³ See, for instance, *תקנות פרנקפורט* as they are given in *Schudt*, IV., p. 81, *seq.*

were shut out of every public amusement, we cannot grudge them the pleasure they drew from these semi-religious dinners. For people of an ascetic disposition it was, perhaps, the only opportunity of enjoying a proper meal. And so, in our days, the most severe father would not deny his lively daughter the pleasure of dancing or singing charitably for the benefit of suffering humanity. The ceremony described was known to the authors of the Middle Ages by the name of *Holle Kreish*. These words are proved by Dr. Perles to be of German origin, and based on some Teutonic superstition into the explanation of which I cannot enter here.¹

Of much more importance was the ceremony of name-giving in the case of a girl, it being the only attention the female child received from the synagogue. The usages were different. In some countries the name was given on the first Sabbath after the birth of the child. The father was called up to the Torah, on which the *מי שברך* followed, including the blessing and the announcement of the child's name. After the prayer the congregation assembled in the house of the parents to congratulate them. In other countries the ceremony took place on the Sabbath when the mother attended the synagogue after the recovery. The ceremony of *Holle Kreish* seems to have been especially observed in the case of a girl.

Though the feasting was now over for the parents, the child still lived in a holiday atmosphere for a long time. In the legend on the "Ages of Men" the child is described in the first year of its existence as a little prince, adored and petted by all. The mother herself nourished and tended the child. Although the Bible already speaks of nurses, many passages in the later Jewish literature show a strong aversion to these substitutes for the mother.² In the case that the father of the child died, the mother was forbidden to marry before her suckling infant reached the age of two years, lest a new courtship might lead to the neglect of the child.

More difficult is it to say in what the other signs of loyalty to the little prince consisted; as, for instance, whether Jews possessed anything like lullabies to soothe the little prince into happy and sweet slumber. At least I am not aware of the existence of such songs in the ancient Jewish literature, nor are they quoted by mediæval writers. The "Schlummerlied," by an unknown Jewish bard, about which German

¹ See his essay in the *Graetz-Jubelschrift*, p. 24, seq.; Güdemann, *Geschichte*, etc., III., pp. 104 and 105.

² *תועלת י"ד* to 1 Samuel vii. (*תועלת י"ד*), *Braultspiegel*, chapter xxxiv. See, however, *Debarim Rabbah*, chapter lx., at the end.

scholars wrote so much, contains more heathen than Jewish elements.¹ From the protest in the *Sepher Chassidim* (§ 238) against using non-Jewish cradle-songs, it seems that little Moshechen was lulled to sleep by the same tunes and words as little Johnny. The only Jewish lullaby of which I know, is to be found in the work of a modern writer who lived in Russia. How far its popularity goes in that country I have no means of ascertaining. This jingle runs as follows :—

O ! hush thee, my darling, sleep soundly my son,
 Sleep soundly and sweetly till day has begun ;
 For under the bed of good children at night
 There lies, till the morning, a kid snowy white.
 We'll send it to market to buy Sechora,
 While my little lad goes to study Torah.
 Sleep soundly at night and learn Torah by day,
 Then thou'lt be a Rabbi when I have grown gray.
 But I'll give thee to-morrow ripe nuts and a toy,
 If thou'lt sleep as I bid thee, my own little boy.²

But naturally the holiday atmosphere I spoke of was very often darkened by clouds resulting from the illness of the child. Excepting small-pox, the child was subject to most of those diseases which so often prove fatal to our children. These diseases were known under the collective name of *צער גדול בנים*, “the difficulties (or the pain) of bringing up children.” These difficulties seem to have been still greater in Palestine, where one of the old Rabbis exclaimed that it was easier to see a whole forest of young olive-trees grow up than to rear one child.³ To avoid so mournful a subject, I refrain from repeating the touching stories relating to the death of children. The pain was the more keenly felt since there was no other way of explaining the misfortune which befell the innocent creature than that it had suffered for the sins of the parents; and the only comfort the latter had was that the child could not have lost much by its being removed from this vale of tears at such an early period. A remarkable legend describes God himself as giving lessons so many hours a day to these prematurely deceased children.⁴ Indeed, to the mind of the old Rabbis, the only thing worth living for was the study of the Torah. Consequently the child that

¹ See Geiger, *Zeitschrift*, 1867, 134. See also *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, III., 93.

² This poem is to be found in the Hebrew novel *תועה בדרכי החיים*, by Smolensky. I am indebted for this beautiful English adaptation to Mrs. Henry Lucas.

³ *Bereshith Rabbah*, chapter xx. For another reading see *ראשית חכמה* (ed. Cracow), p. 374.

⁴ *Abodah Zarah*, 3b.

suffered innocently could not have a better compensation than to learn Torah from the mouth of the Master of masters.

But even when the child was healthy, and food and climate proved congenial to its constitution, there still remained the troubles of its spiritual education. And to be sure it was not an easy matter to bring up a "priest." The first condition for this calling was learning. But learning cannot be acquired without honest and hard industry. It is true that R. Akiba numbers wisdom among the virtues which are hereditary from father to son. Experience, however, has shown that it is seldom the case, and the Talmudists were already troubled with the question how it happens that children so little resemble their fathers in respect of learning.

Certainly Jewish legends can boast of a whole series of prodigies. Thus a certain Rabbi is said to have been so sharp as to have had a clear recollection of the mid-wife who made him a citizen of this world. Ben Sira again, instantly after his birth, entertains his terrified mother with many a wise and foolish saying, refuses the milk she offers him, and asks for solid food. A certain Nachman was born with a prophecy on his lips, predicting the fate of all nations on earth, as well as fixing the date for the coming of the Messiah. The youngest of seven sons of Hannah, who became martyrs under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, was according to one version aged two years, six months, six hours, and thirty minutes. But the way in which he defied the threats of the tyrant was really worthy of one of seventy. R. Judah de Modena is said to have read the Haftarah in the synagogue at the age of two years and a half. A famous Cabbalist Nachum, at the age of three, gave a lecture on the decalogue that lasted for three days. The Chassidim pretended of one of their Rabbis that he remembered all that he had been taught by the angels before his birth, and thus excused their Zaddik's utter neglect of studying anything. Perhaps I may mention in this place a sentence from Schudt, which may reconcile one to the harmless exaggerations of the Chassidim. It relates to a case where a Jewish girl of six was taken away by a Christian with the intention of baptising her, for he maintained that this was the wish and pleasure of the child. Probably the little girl received her instruction from the Christian servant of the house, as has happened many times. Schudt proves that this wish ought to be granted in spite of the minority of the child. He argues: As there is a maxim, "What is wanting in years may be supplied by wickedness," why could not also the reverse be true that

"What the child is wanting in years can be supplied by grace"; a very fine piece of clerical logic indeed. Of a certain R. Meshullam, again we know that he preached in the synagogue at Brody, at the age of nine, and perplexed the chief Rabbi of the place by his deep Talmudical learning. As the Rabbi had a daughter of seven, the cleverness exhibited by the boy Rabbi did not end without very serious consequences for all his life.¹

Happily all these prodigies or children of grace are only exceptional. I say happily, for the Rabbis themselves disliked such creatures. They were more satisfied with those signs of intelligence that indicate future greatness. The following story may serve as an instance:—R. Joshua ben Chananyah once made a journey to Rome. Here he was told that amongst the captives from Jerusalem there was a child with bright eyes, its hair in ringlets, and its features strikingly beautiful. The Rabbi made up his mind to redeem the boy. He went to the prison and addressed the child with a verse from Isaiah, "Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers?" On this the child answered by continuing the second half of the same verse, "Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law." The Rabbi was so delighted with this answer, that he said: "I am sure he will grow up to be a teacher in Israel. I take an oath to redeem him, cost what it may." The child was afterwards known under the name of R. Ishmael ben Elisha.² Such children were ideals of the Rabbis, but they hated the baby scholar, who very often grew impertinent and abused his elders.³ The Rabbis much more preferred the majority of those tiny creatures, which is characterised by the already mentioned legends on the "Ages of Men" as little animals playing, laughing, crying, dancing, and committing all sorts of mischief.

But these children must be taught. Now there is the well-known Boraitha of Judah ben Tema, who used to say that the child at five years was to be taught Scripture, at ten years Mishnah, at thirteen to fulfil the Law, etc. This Boraitha incorporated in most editions to the fifth chapter of the sayings of the Fathers is usually considered as the programme of Jewish education. But, like so many programmes, this

¹ Besides Löw, pp. 67 and 149, see also *Midrash Echa*, chapter i., *Yerushalmi Ketuboth*, V., 6, שם הנדולים החדש I., 58a, Schudt, 279.

² *Gittin*, 58a.

³ *Yerushalmi Sotha*, iii., 4.

tells us rather how things ought to have been than how they were. In the times of the Holy Temple, the participation of the youth in religious actions began at the tenderest age. As soon as they were able to walk a certain distance with the support of their parents, the children had to accompany them on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In the Sabbatical year they were brought to the Temple, to be present at the reading of Deuteronomy by the king. The period at which the child's allegiance to the synagogue began is still more distinctly described. Of the many Talmudical passages relating to this question, I shall select the following quotation from a later Midrash, because it is the most concise. In allusion to Leviticus xix. 23, 24, concerning the prohibition of eating the fruits of a tree in the first three years, this Midrash goes on to say: "And this is also the case with the Jewish child. In the first three years the child is unable to speak, and therefore is exempted from every religious duty, but in the fourth year all its fruits shall be holy to praise the Lord, and the father is obliged to initiate the child in religious works." Accordingly the religious life of the child began as soon as it was able to speak distinctly or with the fourth year of its life. As to the character of this initiation we learn from the same Midrash and also from other Talmudical passages, that it consisted in teaching the child the verses *שמע ישראל* and *נורה צוה לנו משה*. "Moses commanded us the Torah, the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." It was also this year in which the boys began to accompany their parents to the synagogue, carrying their Prayer-books.¹ When the girls first came out—not for their first party, but with the purpose of going to the synagogue—is difficult to decide with any degree of certainty. But if we were to trust a rather doubtful reading in Tractate Sopherim, we might maintain that their first appearance in the synagogue was also at a very tender age. I hope that they behaved there more respectfully than their brothers, who played and cried instead of answering the responses and singing with the congregation. In some communities they proved so great a nuisance, that a certain Rabbi declared it would be better to leave them at home rather than to have the devotion of the whole congregation disturbed by these urchins. Another Rabbi recommended the praiseworthy custom of the Sephardim, who confined all the boys in

¹ See *Tanchuma*, ed. Buber, III., 40a; *Succah*, 42a. From the parallel passages in the *Sifre Debarim* xlvi., and *Tosephta Chagigah*, i. (compare preface to *ספר הירקנה*, iv.) it seems that the father had also the duty of teaching the child to speak the holy language. See also Güdemann, *Geschichte*, etc., I., p. 116, note 2.

the synagogue to one place, and set a special overseer by their side, with a whip in his hands, to force them to keep quiet and to worship with due devotion.¹

A strange custom is known among the Arabian and Palestinian Jews under the name of *Chalaka*. It means the first hair-cutting of the boy after his fourth birthday. As on this occasion, loyalty to the Scripture is shown by not touching the *כַּתֵּף* (corners), the whole action is considered a religious ceremony of great importance. Usually it takes place on the thirty-third day of the Omer, when friends and relatives assemble at the house of the parents. Thither the boy is brought, dressed in his best garments, and every one of the assembly is entrusted with cutting a few hairs, which is considered a great honour. The ceremony is as usual followed by a dinner given to the guests. The Jews in Safed and Tiberias perform the ceremony with great pomp in the courtyard surrounding the grave of R. Simeon ben Jochai, which is supposed to be in one of the neighbouring villages.²

Another custom already mentioned in the Talmud, but which quite disappeared in the latter times, is that of weighing the child. It would be worth reviving if performed in the way in which the mother of Doeg ben Joseph did it. This tender-hearted mother weighed her only son every day, and distributed among the poor as much gold as the amount of the increased weight of her child.³

I pass now to the second great consecration of the boy. I refer to the rites performed on the day when the boy went to school for the first time. This day was celebrated by the Jews, especially in the Middle Ages, in such a way as to justify the high esteem in which they held the school. The school was looked upon as a second Mount Sinai, and the day on which the child entered it as the Feast of Revelation. Of the many different customs, I shall mention here that Min-hag, according to which this day was fixed for the Feast of Weeks. Early in the morning, while still dark, the child was washed and dressed nicely. In some places they dressed it in a Talith. As soon as day dawned the boy was taken to the synagogue, either by his father or by some worthy man of the community. Arrived at their destination, the boy was put on

¹ See Löw, 134, and references. Müller's edition of *Sopherim*, p. 260. About the much-vexed question of taking little children to the synagogue, see, besides the authorities given by Löw, the *מְקוֹר הַכֶּסֶּם*, 21a, and Ralbag's commentary to Nehemiah viii. 2 (lately published in Gruber's *Magazin*, אֲוֶצֶר הַסִּפְרוּת, II.)

² Mr. Luncz's *ירושלים*, II.

³ *Echah Rabba*, chapter I. Compare Ralbag to 2 Samuel xiv. 26.

the Almemor, or reading-dais, before the Scroll of the Law, from which the narrative of the Revelation was read as the portion of the day. From the synagogue the boy was taken to the house of the teacher, who took him into his arms. Thereupon a slate was brought, containing the alphabet in various combinations, the verse, תורה צוה, and the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, and the words תורה תהי אומנתי "The Torah will be my calling." The teacher then read the names of the letters, which the boy repeated. After the reading, the slate was besmeared with honey, which the boy licked off. This was done in allusion to Ezekiel iii. 3, where it is said: "And it (the roll) was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." The boy was also made to eat a sweet cake, on which passages from the Bible were written relating to the importance of the study of the Torah. The ceremony was concluded by invoking the names of certain angels, asking them to open the heart of the boy, and to strengthen his memory.¹ By the way, I am very much afraid that this invocation has to be answerable for the abolition of this ceremony. The year in which this ceremony took place is uncertain, probably not before five, nor later than seven, according to the good or bad health of the child. As to the constitution of the school, the programme of teaching, the payment of the teachers, etc., I must refer the reader to the treatises on the subject, both by English and foreign scholars.

The reverence for the child already hinted at was still further increased when the boy entered the school. The abbreviation תשכ"ר, "the children of the school," is a regular phrase in Jewish literature. It is their pure breath on which the existence of the world is dependent, and it is their merit that justifies us in appealing to the mercy of God. The words of the Scripture, which they uttered quite innocently, were considered as oracles; and many a Rabbi gave up an undertaking on account of a verse pronounced by a schoolboy, who hardly understood its importance. Hear only one instance: R. Jochanan was longing to see his friend Mar Samuel in Babylon. After many disturbances and delays, he at last undertook his journey. On the way he passed a school, where the boys were reciting the verse from 1 Samuel xxviii. 3, "And Samuel died." This was accepted by him as a hint given by Providence that all was over with his friend.²

Especially famous for their wisdom and sharpness were the

¹ See Güdemann, *Geschichte*, etc., I., 50, note 2, and III., 112. See also אגרות שר"ל, p. 466, קב הישר, chapter 72, and שו"ת חוות יאיר No. 16, at the end.

² *Chulin*, 95b.

children of Jerusalem. From the many illustrative stories given in *Midrash Echah Rabbathi*, the following one will suffice:—R. Joshua was one day riding on his donkey along the high road. As he passed a well, he saw a little girl there, and asked her to give him some water. Now she gave water to him and to his animal. The Rabbi thanked her with the words: "My daughter, you acted like Rebecca." "To be sure," she answered, "I acted like Rebecca; but you did not behave like Eleazar."¹ I must add that there are passages in Jewish literature from which, with a little ingenuity, it might be deduced that Jewish babies are the most beautiful of their kind. The assertion made by a monk that Jewish children are inferior to Christian children is a dreadful libel. The author of the *Nizzachon Yashan*, in whose presence this assertion was made, was probably childless, or he would have simply scratched out the eyes of this malicious monk, instead of giving a mystical reason for the superior beauty of any other children than his own.²

Another point to be emphasised is that the boys were not confined all day long to the close air of the school-room. They had also their hours of recreation. This recreation consisted chiefly, as one can imagine, in playing. Their favourite game was the ball, boys as well as girls being fond of this form of amusement. They did not deny themselves this pleasure even on festivals. They were also fond of the kite and games with nuts, in which their mothers also took part. Letter-games and riddles also occupied their minds in the recreation-hours. The angel Sandalphon, who bears in the *Cabbala* also the name of "Boy," was considered by the children as their special patron, and they invoked him in their plays, addressing to him the words: "Sandalphon, Lord of the forest, protect us from pain."³ Speaking generally, there are very few Jewish games. From the researches of Zunz, Güdemann and Löw on this subject, it is clear that the Jews always adopted the pastimes of the peoples among whom they dwelt.

On the other hand, it must not be thought that there was too much playing. Altogether, Jewish education was far from spoiling the children. And though it was recommended—if such recommendation is necessary—to love children more than one's own soul, the Rabbis strongly condemned that blind partiality towards our own offspring, which ends in

¹ *Echah Rabba*, chapter I. See Perles, *Zur Rabbinischen Sprach- und Sagenkunde*, p. 91.

² Wagenseil *Tela igna*, 251.

³ Goldberg on the periodical *Lebanon*, VI., 142.

burdening our world with so many good-for-nothings. The sad experience of certain Biblical personages served as a warning for posterity. And even from the quite natural behaviour of Jacob towards his son Joseph, which had the best possible results in the end, they drew the lesson which no man must show to one of his children marks of greater favour than to the others.¹ In later times they have been even anxious to conceal this love altogether, and some Rabbis went so far as to refrain from kissing their children.² The severity of Akabya ben Mahalel is worth mentioning, if not imitating. When this Rabbi, only a few minutes before his death, was asked by his son to recommend him to his friends and colleagues, the answer the poor boy received was: Your conduct will recommend you to my friends, or will estrange you from them.³ Another Rabbi explained the words וְחַיִּים לְנַעֲרֹתֶיךָ: Give life to thy youth, to mean teach him temperance in his diet, and do not accustom him to meat and wine.⁴ R. Jehuda Hachassid, in the Middle Ages, gives the advice to rich parents to withdraw their resources from their sons, if they lead a disorderly life. The struggle for their existence, and the hardship of life, would bring them back to God.⁵ When the old Rabbi said that poverty is a most becoming ornament for Jews, his remark was probably suggested by a similar thought. And many a passage in the Rabbinic literature gives expression to the same idea as that in Goethe's divine lines:—

“ Wer nie sein Brot mit Thränen ass,
Wer nie die kummervollen Nächte
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,
Der kennt Euch nicht, Ihr himmlischen Mächte.”

I have spoken of a kingdom of priests, but there is one great disadvantage in such a polity. One or two priests in a community may be sustained by the liberality of the congregation. But if a community consisted of only priests, how could that be maintained? Besides, the old Jewish ideal expected the teacher to be possessed of a divine goodness, imparting his benefits only as an act of grace. Salaries, therefore, either for teaching or preaching, or giving ritual decisions, were strongly forbidden. The solution of the question already put by the Bible, “And if ye shall say, What shall we eat?” is to be found in the law that every father was obliged

¹ Sabbath, 10b.

² See, for instance, the will of R. Süßkind, of Horodna.

³ Edyoth, V., 7.

⁴ Chulin, 84a.

⁵ Sepher Chassidim, 325.

to teach his son a handicraft, enabling him to obtain a living.

I have now to speak about the date with which childhood is brought to a conclusion. It is, as I stated above, in the case of a girl at the beginning of the thirteenth year, and in that of a boy at the beginning of the fourteenth year. As a reason for this priority I will reproduce the words of R. Chisda, who said that God has endowed women with a greater portion of intelligence than man, and therefore she obtains her maturity at an earlier period than man does.¹ A very nice compliment, indeed; but like all compliments it is of no practical consequence whatever. It is not always the wiser who get the better of it in life. Whilst the day on which the girl obtained her majority passed unnoticed either by her or by her family, it was marked in the boy as the day on which he became a son of the Law, and was distinguished by various rites and ceremonies, and by the bestowing on him of beautiful presents. I assume that there is no need to describe these well-known ceremonies. I miss only the wig, which used to form the chief ornament of the boy on this happy day.²

Less known, however, is the origin of this ceremony, and the reason for fixing its date. It cannot claim a very high antiquity. I may remark that in many cases it takes centuries before an idea or a notion takes practical shape, and is crystallised into a custom or *Minhag*, and still longer before this custom is fossilised into a law or *Din*. As far as the Bible goes there is not the slightest indication of the existence of such a ceremony. From Leviticus xxvii. 5, and Numbers xiv. 29, it would rather seem that it was not before the twentieth year that the man was considered to have obtained his majority, and to be responsible for his actions. It was only in the times of the Rabbis, when Roman influence became prevalent in juristic matters at least, that the date of thirteen, or rather the *pubertas*, was fixed as giving the boy his majority.³ But it would be a mistake to think that before having obtained this majority the boy was considered as under age in every respect. Certainly the law made every possible effort to connect him with the synagogue, and to

¹ *Niddah*, 45b. An interesting question concerning the confirmation of girls is to be found also in *Nizzachon Yashan* in Wagenseil's *Tela igna*, I., 251.

² See Schudt, II.*, 295.

³ Löw has treated the subject with such thoroughness, that it is impossible to add anything to it. Perhaps it is necessary to say that the term בר מצוה occurring in the Talmud (e.g. *Baba Mezia*, 96a) has nothing to do with the majority of the boy.

initiate him in his religious duties long before the age of thirteen.

We have seen that the boy's first appearance in the synagogue was at the beginning of the fourth year. We have noticed the complaints about his troublesome behaviour. But how could we expect the poor child to be attentive to things which quite surpassed the intellectual faculties of his tender age? There was no better reason for this attendance either in the Holy Temple or in the synagogue than that the parents might be rewarded by God for their trouble of taking their children there. These cares, by the way, were most incumbent upon the women. The mother of R. Joshua enjoyed this trouble so much that she carried her boy, when still in the cradle, to the Beth Hamidrash, in order that his ears might be accustomed to the sound of the Torah.¹ In later times there was another excuse for taking the little children to the synagogue. They were there allowed to sip the wine of the Kiddush, which was the exclusive privilege of the children; an easy way of worshipping, but, as you can observe, it is a method that they enjoy and understand most excellently. They did not less enjoy and understand the service with which they were charged on the day of "The Rejoicing of the Law." On this feast they were provided with flags, which they carried before the bearers of the Torah, who feasted them after the service with sweets. Another treat was that of being called up on this day to the Torah, a custom that is still extant. In the Middle Ages they went in some countries so far as to allow these little fellows who did not wear caps to be called up to say the blessings over the Law bare-headed. A very nice custom was that every Sabbath, after finishing the weekly portion and dressing the Sepher Torah, the children used to come up to the Almemor and kiss the Torah.² Leaving the synagogue they kissed the hands of the scholars. At home the initiation began by the blessing the child received on every eve of the Sabbath, by teaching it the first verse of the Shema, and other verses as already mentioned. Short prayers, consisting of one sentence, were also chosen³ for children of this age. The function of the child on the Seder-night is well known. Besides the putting of the four questions, the boy had also to recite or rather to sing the Hallel. But I am afraid that they

¹ *Yerushalmi Yebamoth*, I., § 6. Perhaps it was this fact that suggested the *Keriath-Shema-Leinen*. For, as they could not carry the child into the synagogue, they brought the synagogue to the child.

² *Or Zarua*, II., 11b; *Reshith Chochma*, 313b. ³ *Pesikta Rabbati*, 174.

enjoyed better the song of *הד גרית*, which was composed or rather adapted for their special entertainment, from an old German poem.¹

Within three or four years after entering the synagogue, and with the growth of intellect and strength, the religious duties of the boy increased, and became of a more serious character. He had not only to attend the school, which was troublesome enough, but he was also expected to attend the services more regularly, and to gain something by it. Yet the Rabbis were not so tyrannical as to put unjust demands on the patience of the child. The voice of God on Mount Sinai, the Rabbis said, was adapted to the intellect, and the powers of all who witnessed the Revelation—adapted, as the Midrash says, to the powers of old and young, children and women. It was in accordance with this sentiment that the Rabbis suited even their language to the needs of the less educated classes. Thus we read in the *Massecheth Soferim* that according to the *Din* the portion of the week, after having been recited in Hebrew, must be translated into the language of the vernacular for the benefit of the unlearned people, the women, and the children.² Another consideration children experienced from the Rabbis was that at the age of nine or ten the boy was initiated into the observance of the Day of Atonement by fasting a few hours. But that this good work might not be overdone, and thus endanger the child, the sage R. Acha used to tell his congregation after the prayer of Musaph, "My brethren, let every one of you who has a child go home and make it eat."³ In later centuries, when the disease of small-pox became so fatal, some Rabbis declared that it is every father's duty to leave the town with his children as soon as the plague showed itself. The joy with which the Rabbis hailed the invention of Dr. Jenner deserves our recognition. None of them perceived in vaccination a defiance of Providence. R. Abraham Nansich, from London, wrote a pamphlet to prove its lawfulness. The Cabbalist Buzagli disputed Dr. Jenner's priority, but nevertheless approved of vaccination. R. Israel Lipschütz declared that the Doctor acquired salvation by his new remedy.⁴

With his advancing age, not only the boy's duties were increased, but also his rights. An enumeration of all these rights would lead me too far, but I shall mention the cus-

¹ Brull, *Jahrbuch*, IV., 97, and Perles. *Gruetz-Jubelschrift*, 37.

² *Shemoth Rabbah*, chapter 5, and *Massecheth Soferim*, chapter 18.

³ *Yerushalmi Yoma*, VI., § 4. See also *Tossephtha*, *ibid.*, chapter V.

⁴ עלה תרופה, London, and the commentary *תפארת ישראל* to *Aboth*, III., 14.

tom which allowed to the boy the recital of Kaddish and Borchu in the synagogue. We have restricted this privilege to the orphan boy. It is interesting to hear that girls were also admitted to say Kaddish in the synagogue, in case their parents left no male issue. I have myself witnessed such a case. In some countries the boy had the exclusive privilege of reading the prayers on the evenings of the festivals and Sabbaths. R. Simeon ben Eleazar, in the fifteenth century, again received his family name **ברוך שאמר** from the skill with which he recited this prayer when a boy. He chanted it so nicely that he was called by the members of the community Master **ברוך שאמר**.¹ As to the question whether the boy, while under age, was allowed to be considered as one of the ten when Minyan was required, or one of the three in the case of Mesuman, I can only say that the authorities never agreed in this respect. Whilst the one insisted upon his having obtained his majority, the other was satisfied with his showing such signs of intelligence as would enable him to participate in the ceremony in question. Here is an instance of such a sign. Abaje and Raba, the two celebrated heroes of the Babylonian Talmud, were sitting at the table of Rabbah. Before saying grace he asked them, "Do you know to whom these prayers are addressed?" Thereupon one boy pointed to the roof, whilst the other boy went out and pointed to the sky. The examiner was satisfied with their answer.²

The privilege of putting on the *Tephillin* forms now in most countries the chief distinction of the Barmitzvah; in olden times, however, every boy had claim to it as soon as he showed the ability of behaving respectfully when wearing the holy symbol. It even happened that certain honours of the synagogue were bestowed on the clever boys, though under age. We possess a copy of a Jewish epitaph dating from about the third century, which was written in Rome for a boy of eight years, who is there designed as archon.³ The fact is the more curious, as on the other hand the Palestinian R. Abuha, who lived in the same century, maintained that no man must be elected as Parnass before he achieved his fiftieth year. That boys were admitted to preach in the synagogue I mentioned before.

From all these remarks it will easily be seen that in olden times the boy enjoyed almost all the rights of majority long before the day of his Barmitzvah. The condition of the

¹ Preface to his book **ברוך שאמר**.

² *Berachoth*, 48a.

³ See Schürer's *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom*, p. 24. Compare *Hamazkir* xix., p. 79.

novice is hardly discernible from that of the initiated priest. The Talmud, the Gaonim, and even R. Isaac Alfassi and Maimonides knew neither the term Barmitzvah nor any ceremony connected with it.¹ There is only one slight reference to such an institution, recorded in the Massecheth Sopherim, with the quotation of which I shall conclude this paper. We read there: "In Jerusalem there was the godly custom to initiate the children with the *beginning* of the thirteenth year by fasting the whole Day of Atonement."² During this year they took the boy to the priests and learned men that they might bless him, and pray for him that God might think him worthy of a life devoted to the study of the Torah and pious works." For, this author says, "they were beautiful, and their lives harmonious and their hearts directed to God."

S. SCHECHTER.

¹ See note 3, p. 20.

² Ed. Müller. p. xxx. and 258.